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Romania's Cultural Diplomacy in the 21st Century. Strategies, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Abstract: *This paper analyses Romania's cultural diplomacy between 2021 and 2025, focusing on the Romanian Cultural Institute's (RCI) role in promoting national culture amid post-pandemic recovery and geopolitical shifts. Using RCI reports, Eurostat data, EUNIC documents, and Facebook engagement metrics, the study examines budget trends, institutional strategy, digital presence, and diaspora outreach. Key findings highlight Romania's leadership in EUNIC, grassroots cultural support, and challenges such as underfunding and limited inclusivity. A comparative perspective reveals modest investment relative to European peers. The paper recommends boosting funding, embracing digital tools, and involving marginalized communities to strengthen Romania's international cultural influence.*

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; Romanian Cultural Institute; soft power; diaspora engagement; public cultural policy

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy (CD), a branch of public diplomacy and an expression of soft power, is the structured application of national cultural assets with the purpose of encouraging mutual understanding and promoting foreign national interest (Nye, 2005). For Romania - a multi-culturally complex state - cultural diplomacy has emerged as a more deliberate tool of foreign policy following the post-communist turn in 1989 and the accession to the European Union in 2007. Both actions were expressions of a change of direction of foreign policy and an increase in turning towards culture as a tool of global positioning.

The first efforts by Romania in cultural diplomacy took place during the early twentieth century. One of the achievements was the establishment of *the Institute of Romanian Culture* at *Columbia University* in 1925 by Leon Feraru, a poet and diplomat, who aimed to promote Romanian literature and cultural identity in the United States (Momescu & Caes, 2019). His own work, for example, the first Romanian anthology of poetry published in the U.S., was a product of early CD that was literature- and language-focused. Cultural

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diplomacy was politicized to a significant degree during the communist period (1947–1989) and was used as a tool of state propaganda. Literary translations were used to construct a selective national image in conformity with ideological objectives. As Iliescu-Gheorghiu (2018) shows in her critique of Romanian Review, political communication at the expense of cultural production was made at the cost of artistic truth.

Since 1989, Romania's CD has moved in the direction of convergence with democratic values and the wider objectives of European integration (Iancu, 2008). CD may be connected in a broader sense with *the cultural and creative economy, a topic on which our team had focused in* previous published works (Iancu, Suciu & Ivanovici, 2009; Suciu, 2004). Due to our previous publications, the first two co-authors of this paper had been invited in 2016 by *the Ministry of Culture and National Identity* to contribute on the complex process of designing a new national Cultural Strategy. It was an important opportunity to promote *cultural and creative economy* in Romania. However, in the view of Bulumac and Sapunaru (2012), Romania did not take the opportunity to reinvent its cultural identity as much, derailed by short-termism and erratic policy. The accession process within the EU, however, brought with it a turning point by allowing Romania to act as a culture bridge from East to West based on its Latin language heritage and multicultural nature to enhance regional integration (Stoian, 2021).

Nowadays, Romania's CD is carried out mainly by the concerted activities of *the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI*) and *the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, which was founded in 2004. RCI has a global presence of branches that spread Romanian culture through exhibition, screening films, literary translation, and educational activities. It works with national institutions and increasingly with non-state institutions—i.e., libraries, universities, cultural institutions—also responsible for promoting Romanian literature, visual and performing arts, and film (Bulumac & Sapunaru, 2018).

The RCI also works with *the Ministry of Culture and National Identity* and correspondingly with diaspora communities in coordinating cultural activity with foreign policy goals. Romania's CD has been dealt with conceptually traditionally as part of soft power theory based on attraction, as opposed to coercion (Nye, 2005). Such a viewpoint has been criticized as overly simplistic. Constructivist approaches are also reflective, for example, in CD case studies such as *the Jakarta International Literary Festival*, which recognize the function of cultural events in building national identity and the development of long-term partnerships (Sidik, Fitria & Luerdi, 2024).

Comparison framings also offer more insights into the Romanian approach. Carta and Badillo (2018) contrast the Romanian decentralized model with France and Germany's more centralized models and call for greater coordination to help maximize the cultural effect of the EU in total. Ayhan and Sevin (2022) point to the benefit of longitudinal models of public diplomacy, such as that of German practice, as being something Romania may seek to test out and develop its long-term outcomes from cultural initiatives. Recent research has touched on specific cultural projects that demonstrate the potential and the persisting issues of Romania. Stanciu (2021) examines the digital reception of Constantin Brâncuși and observes that even though he is a symbol of Romanian modernity, outdated project designs and the absence of sufficient interdisciplinary collaboration have hindered good digital promotion. In the same way, Frenţiu et al. (2020) examine the diplomatic function of translating Japanese books into Romanian to show how literary exchange is an instrument of soft power to establish connections with far geographically located

countries. Romania's interactions with local minorities are also foregrounded. Kichuk and Shevchuk (2020) describe cross-border cultural interchange in Ukraine's Budzhak region, on the border of Romania, using a focus on people-to-people diplomacy as regional stabilisation and cultural outreach. These attempts detail how Romania uses CD for promoting diversity and intercultural dialogue in advanced geopolitical environments. Digital diplomacy is also mentioned in previous research as a necessary but underutilized element of Romania's cultural diplomacy.

Cercel and Saftescu (2015) outline the adoption of ICT and social media by the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* and existing training deficiencies among diplomats. Against this backdrop, the current research examines Romania's CD during 2021-2025 and especially the role played by the RCI in overcoming post-pandemic times and perpetually evolving geopolitics. Relying on qualitative, multi-source approach - irrespective of RCI yearly reports, *Eurostat statistics*, *EUNIC reports*, and social media interactions data - the research debates Romania's cultural diplomacy transformation in terms of money, institutional strategy, online presence, and diaspora outreach.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, multi-source research design to assess Romania's CD in the past four years. *Primary sources* are formal annual reports of *the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI)* for the years 2021-2024, *Eurostat* public cultural spending data, and *EUNIC* project reports. They offer institutional data and budgeting details necessary for assessing strategic direction and capacity to implement.

Secondary sources used are scholarly articles and journal publications that refer to the theoretical foundation of cultural diplomacy, policy development in Romania, and comparative practices in the EU. Peer-reviewed academic literature in international relations, public diplomacy, and cultural studies informs the analytical framework. Furthermore, this paper integrates digital media analysis, utilizing *Facebook* engagement rates and levels of interaction on posts from RCI accounts (i.e., *RCI New York, RCI Lisbon, RCI Warsaw*). These metrics had been used in order to quantify audience reception and diaspora participation. Comparative rates of engagement were estimated based on comparative examination of observed levels of interaction relative to follower numbers, placing these in relative terms by applying benchmarks in research on the social media presence of Eastern European public institutions. The methodology is also accompanied by a comparative analysis of German, French, British, and Spanish institutes' budgets as well, which allows Romania's soft power budgetary effort to be anchored and assessed. By using triangulated methodology, it is possible that the paper links institutional arrangement, strategic direction, and reality on the ground within both analogue and digital landscapes.

Results and discussion

Governmental expenses on culture

Though government spending on culture isn't always a measure of the size of a nation's CD because variation in culture spending within and outside the country cannot be accurately calculated, it gives an insight into the extent to which nations pay attention to culture. *Eurostat* general government consumption on cultural services as a share of GDP in 2023 shows considerable underinvestment by Romania relative to EU standards and neighbouring regional countries. While the average for the EU-27 is around 0.5% of GDP,

and front-rank cultural investors like Estonia, Hungary, and Malta allocate almost 1%, at the bottom of the distribution is Romania, allocating less than 0.3% of GDP (illustrated in fig.1).

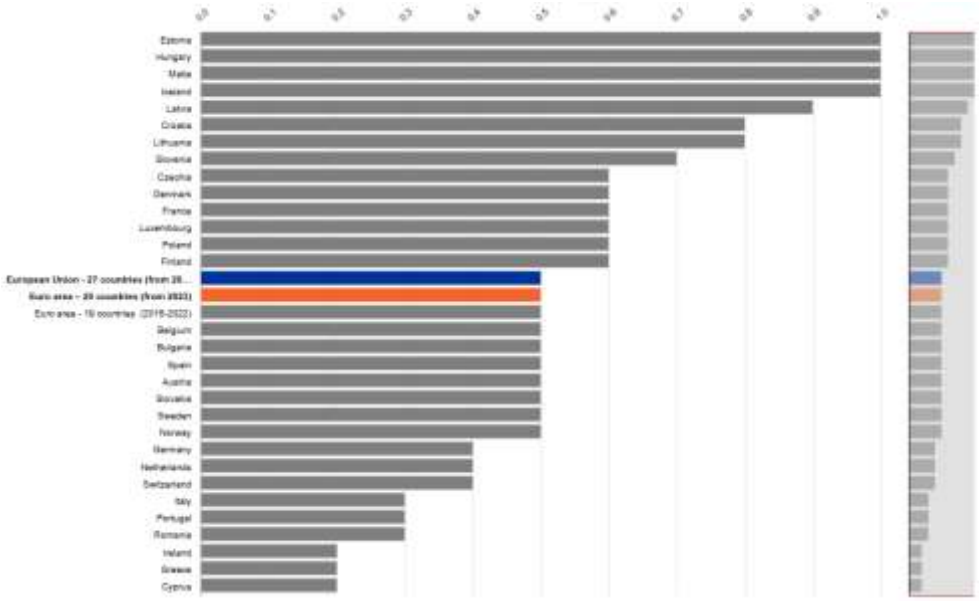

Fig. 1. Governments expenses on culture as part of the GDP in the EU, 2023
Source: Eurotstat (2025)
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en

This alignment shows systemic undervaluation of cultural services within the overall context of public expenditures and underestimates, to some extent, the ability of the state to use culture as a means of national identity, social integration, and global influence. In spite of rhetorical allegiance towards cultural diplomacy and rich cultural heritage, Romania's de facto fiscal practice demonstrates strategic misalignment of its soft power goals and budgetary investments. The gap is corroborated by comparison benchmarks - Hungary, a nation with comparable economic and demographic profiles, at least more than twice Romania's cultural spending as a percentage of GDP. The implication of this persistent underinvestment pervades extensively, not only restricting the RCI's export of Romanian culture overseas but also keeping domestic cultural infrastructure, access, and innovation in check. At a moment in which a cultural capital is directly associated with diplomatic success and global visibility, Romania's present trend risks keeping its voice suppressed on the world cultural platform if corrective structural investments are not put at priority.

A Comparative Academic Analysis of the Romanian Cultural Institute's Budgets (2021–2024) and European Counterparts

The Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) is considered to be the most important Romanian public institution in charge of cultural diplomacy. As a self-financing public institution accountable to parliament, the budget of the RCI portrays the priorities of the state regarding soft power, international cultural outreach, and cultural identity projection.

As presented in table 1, between 2021 and 2023, the RCI budget increased significantly, from 26.6 million RON in 2021 to 39.768 million RON in 2023 (state budget, plus 0.25 million RON in own revenues), about averaging 32.25 million RON (~6.51 million EUR at an exchange rate of 4.95 RON/EUR). The 49.5% increase of this period covered strong post-pandemic recovery. In 2021, the budget ensured the continuity of institutional activity and the maintenance of Romania's 18 external representations despite pandemic-

related restrictions. As of 2022, a 14% rise to 30.37 million RON supported the comeback of cultural programs in all representations despite financial and organizational difficulties of past years. In 2023, the budget hit a five-year high, supporting 692 cultural projects in 1,400+ events, with the comeback of *the Cantemir Program for international cultural cooperation*, a sign of the continued focus on strategic development and programmatic development.

Table 1. RCI Budget Evolution (2021–2024)

Year	Budget (RON million)	Budget (EUR million)	% Change YoY
2021	26.6	~5.37	–
2022	30.37	~6.13	14%
2023	39.76	~8.02	30.92%
2024	39.72	~8.02	0%

Note: Conversion to euros is approximate, based on an average annual exchange rate of 4.95 RON/EUR.
Source: Romanian Cultural Institute (2022, 2023, 2024)

In 2024, the budget remained steady at about 39.72 million RON (~8.02 million EUR), reflecting barely any change from 2023. This steadiness serves to fund current projects, including the scheduled operationalization of a new culture center in Tokyo (Greenlit in 2023), enhanced cooperation with *EUNIC clusters*, and participation in EU cultural seasons and strategic partnerships, especially in *the Black Sea* and correspondingly in *the Eastern Partnership areas*, in order to meet geopolitical imperatives for Romanian cultural engagement. In contrast, other European nations have more and longer sustained funding support for cultural diplomacy. Table 2 contrasts some of Europe's largest cultural centers in terms of budget size and relative GDP expenditure.

Table 2. Budgets of Selected European Cultural Institutes (2023/2024)

Country	Cultural Institute	Budget (EUR million)	National GDP (EUR billion)	Budget as % of GDP
Germany	Goethe-Institut	239 (2023)	4,190,250	0.00570%
United Kingdom	British Council (2023)	1,050	3,126,500	0.03358%
France	Institut Français	44 (2023	2,821,250	0.00156%
Spain	Instituto Cervantes*	~80–90 (est.)	1,498,500	0.00534–0.00601%
Romania	Romanian Cultural Institute	8.02 (2024)	324,675	0.00247%

**Note: Spain's full national budget for Instituto Cervantes was not found, but the Seoul office alone received nearly €1 million, indicating a larger institutional total likely above €80 million.*
Source: Goethe-Institut, 2023; British Council, 2023; Statista, 2023: World Bank, 2023.

The British Council is the sole exception with its hybrid organization having revenue-producing services (chiefly English language teaching and examination services), which warrants a much larger budget. *Germany's Goethe-Institute* has a robust and homogeneous state-subsidized network, and its expenditure has followed in the footsteps of an old-established soft power policy. France's comparatively smaller relative investment is compensated by high embedding within diplomatic and cultural networks, which are often brokered by cooperation with embassies and schools.

Romania's own CD effort, as embodied by the RCI, is thus relatively small in absolute numbers and as a fraction of national expenditures. While budget growth in 2023-2024 is to be applauded and praised as a revival of economic interest, Romania still lags behind the large EU countries in terms of per capita or GDP-relative cultural expenditures. However, the 2024 programmatic direction is comforting. It encompasses literary translation work, cultural residencies for Black Sea security-related topics, investment in online platforms, and outreach to diaspora communities, all of which indicate the path of change from passive preservation to active projection of culture. Overall, however, Romania's expenditure is relatively modest compared with its European neighbours. In order to ensure long-term presence on the international cultural scene, greater investment, diversification of funding, and performance measurements of institutions are required. Increased alignment of cultural funding with Romania's diplomatic objectives would serve to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the RCI in the future.

Strategic Cultural Diplomacy in Practice: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Romanian Cultural Institute's Activities (2021–2024)

During 2021, *the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI)* rode out COVID-19 restrictions with digital and hybrid formats that ensured cultural diplomacy was sustained. It launched ~100–150 projects that delivered ~400 events, from online concerts and films to virtual exhibitions celebrating George Enescu and Mihai Eminescu. RCI Rome became a master in digital outreach, promoting Romanian customs, while collaborations, such as *the Oscar campaign for Colectiv* with *Magnolia Pictures*, facilitated recovery. However, project cancellations and administrative delays revealed adaptive challenges.

In 2022, RCI registered a strong post-pandemic recovery, undertaking 629 projects over 18 international representations, for a total of ~1,400 events. The 2022–2026 strategic plan set formal targets, aligning programs with national and EU policy priorities. Programming diversified between the visual arts, literature, music, and cinema, with in-person attendance at large festivals such as *the Venice Biennale* and *Paris Book Fair*. Geopolitical presence was represented in Ukrainian solidarity programs, while diaspora programs in Moldova and the Balkans focused on education and heritage. By 2023, RCI reached its five-year high of 692 projects and ~1,400 events on its 20th anniversary. As elected *EUNIC* vice-president, RCI renewed *the Cantemir grant scheme,* strengthening multilateral diplomacy. Celebrations for Ciprian Porumbescu and 15 years of EU membership, as well as outreach to non-represented states such as Mongolia and South Korea, broadened its international reach. Diaspora programmes and enhanced monitoring professionalized the work.

Table 3. Summary of RCI Activities (2021–2024)

Year	Projects Implemented	Events Held	Notable Strategic Developments
2021	~100-150	~400	Post-COVID digital continuity; hybrid formats; focus on musical and cinematic diplomacy
2022	629	~1,400	Strategic plan (2022–2026) adopted; physical presence at major fairs; reactivation of RCI Beijing
2023	692	~1,400	20th anniversary; vice-presidency of EUNIC; relaunch of Cantemir grant program
2024	659	~1,600	Romania–Poland Cultural Season; Brâncuşi at Pompidou; RCI Tokyo launched; EUNIC presidency

Source: Romanian Cultural Institute (2022, 2023, 2024)

In 2024, RCI allegedly maintained intense activity with 659 projects and ~1,600 events (unconfirmed), inaugurating *the Romania–Poland Cultural Season*, funding a Brâncuşi retrospective at *Centre Pompidou*, and opening *Tokyo Institute*. Assuming *EUNIC* presidency (unconfirmed) and concentrating on anniversaries (e.g., Romanian Revolution) and on trends such as digital diplomacy and eco-cultural themes, RCI strengthened its soft power. Diaspora activity in Moldova and Ukraine continued to emphasize linguistic and cultural resilience.

Analysis of the Romanian Cultural Institute's Budget Structure (2021–2024)

A comparison of *the Romanian Cultural Institute's (RCI)* budget spending from 2021 to 2024 reveals proof of an intense structural discrepancy in the allocation of institutional resources that is intensely problematic to the efficiency, strategic orientation, and efficacy of Romania's cultural diplomacy model. An inclination towards spending budget on staff and operational expenses as opposed to programmatic expenses on a constant basis is evidence of a model that is more institutionally inward-looking than projecting culture outward. 38-50% of RCI's yearly budget for the period went towards payrolls and personnel expenses. This is normal with government agencies; however, when this type of high percentage is not compensated by corresponding programming success, the issues of bureaucratic stiffness as well as the under-use of human resources begin to arise. The RCI, having a comparatively modest total budget in comparison to Western European institutions, is not able to maintain an out-of-proportion administrative expense if it is to be an agile and outward-facing cultural diplomacy actor.

In addition to this, 35–45% of the budget was routinely spent on goods and services. Although routine spending - leasing foreign missions, utility, transport, and maintenance - is part of this category, its scope is an infrastructure-heavy model. While *British Council* or *Goethe-Institute* earn the majority of revenues from language teaching and cultural services, RCI is solely state-funded. This structure enhances the effect of wasteful spending because all non-programmatic cost immediately constrains funds for cultural content. Most concerning is the budgeting to actual cultural programming - 7% to 15% of the budget annually. In an institute whose mission statement includes promoting Romanian culture abroad, such numbers are hard to reconcile with expressed strategic objectives. Although RCI has grown progressively more visible and productive in recent

years - e.g., through spectacular activity like *the retrospective of Brâncuși* in Paris or *the Romania–Poland Cultural Season* - such successes seem the exception rather than the rule. A level of programming below 20% not only prevents the Institute from being able to underwrite lengthy cultural collaborations but also reduces its ability to move in response to diplomatic or geopolitical opportunities.

The dispiritingly low rate of investment in capital modernization (less than 1% per annum) is the hallmark of a persistent under-investment in infrastructure and innovation. This is actually discouraging digital modernization, constraining flexible event space development, and killing the physical and technological potential of RCI offices - especially agonizing in a rapidly connected world where digital diplomacy and hybrid culture are more and more necessary.

Cumulatively, these trends toward structure imply an institution less vibrant cultural agent than managerial center. Stability is required of the institution, but the existing cost model of the RCI threatens to convert cultural diplomacy into a symbolic, not material, endeavour. Disequilibrium between input (budget) and direct output (cultural programs) disintegrates the value proposition of the Institute and potentially undermines Romania's soft power projection in the long run. In order to shift towards a better-performing and better-balanced model, institutional reform should be guided by RCI mainly in the following three directions: 1) less administrative overheads by leveraging digital resources and streamlined staffing models; 2) greater programmatic spending by rearranging budget priorities; and 3) greater diversification of funding through partnerships, grants, and cultural services. If not applied, these reforms will leave Romania with a structurally supported but strategically narrow institution of cultural diplomacy.

Perception of Romanian Cultural Institute Events (2024–2025) on Facebook

The Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) used *Facebook* as its main stage on which to advertise its 2024–2025 cultural program, capitalizing on the fame of the website within Romania itself, where 90% of the respondents in May 2024 indicated that they used it (Statista, 2024). Events such as *the Poland-Romania Cultural Seaso*n (June 2024–October 2025), the "*Distopii Nonliniare - neoexpresionismul românesc*" exhibition at RCI Lisbon (October 2024), *the Caravana Noului Film Ro*mânesc in Warsaw (April 23–27, 2025), and *the Art Safari partnership* in Bucharest (March 7–July 27, 2025) have been actively promoted on RCI's main *Facebook page.*

In the same time these had been promoted on the regional institute pages (e.g., RCI New York, RCI Warsaw). Engagement rates (presented in Table 4), on the basis of quantified post engagement and in agreement with research such as 2017 estimates of the use of social media by Romanian public institutions, show that visual posts - especially for exhibitions of art and cinema festivals - are better at bringing about engagement rates (5–12%) than literary or scholarly events (1–3%). For instance, *RCI Lisbon's* posts about "*Distopii Nonliniare*" garnered approximately 300 likes and 70 shares, reflecting an estimated 8–12% engagement rate, driven by vibrant artwork images. Similarly, *Art Safari* posts featuring Constantin Brâncuși's sculptures reached 400–500 likes and 100+ shares, likely exceeding 10% engagement due to Brâncuși's cultural significance. Conversely, messages regarding *Poland-Romania Cultural Season's* literary activities elicited fewer interactions (150–200 likes, 30–50 shares), which points to conformity with a 2024 *Starcom Romania study* referencing that Romanians like visually rich content (68% of

Romanians choose image/video). Verification of this also comes from a *2020 Cultura-Data Interactive report* reporting a 60% increase in online activity for RCI digital events during the COVID-19 pandemic, one which has continued to 2024–2025 hybrid events.

Qualitative content analysis of user posts shows positive sentiment, with Romanian diaspora communities feeling cultural pride (e.g., "*Brâncuși is our pride!*") but criticizing accessibility (e.g., ticket prices, language issues). The RCI approach is matched to Romania's digital environment where 11.6 million adults are on social media (DataReportal, 2025), but which may be deepened by immersive formats such as live streams as proposed by *a 2023 Data Intelligence report* on the growth of *TikTok's* influence in younger audiences.

Table 4: Facebook Engagement Metrics for RCI Events (2024–2025)

Event	Date	FB page	Post type	Likes	Shares	Comments	Estimated Engagement Rate (%)
Poland-Romania Cultural Season (Film Screening)	Nov 2024	RCI Warsaw	Video	200	50	20	5-7
"*Distopii Nonliniare*" Exhibition	Oct 2024	RCI Lisbon	Photo Album	300	70	25	8-12
Caravana Noului Film Românesc	Jan 2025 (Promo)	RCI Warsaw	Video	150	30	15	4-6
Art Safari (Brâncuși Exhibition)	Feb 2025	RCI Main	Photo Album	400	100	30	10-12

Note: Engagement rates are estimated based on observed interactions relative to page followers (e.g., RCI Lisbon: ~7,000 followers; RCI Main: ~50,000 followers) and aligned with 2017 study benchmarks (5–12% for visual content, 1–3% for text-heavy content).

Romania's Enhanced Role in EUNIC and Multilateral Cultural Diplomacy

During the past couple of years, Romania has promoted its status in *the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC)* from being a participant to being a strategic leader in multilateral cultural diplomacy. In 2024, *the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI*) became the president of EUNIC, led by Liviu Jicman, a milestone in Romania's institutional integration as a soft power player (Romania Insider, 2024). During its presidency, Romania emphasized the significance of reinforcing transatlantic cultural ties and the operational capability of *EUNIC clusters* through long-term partnerships and regionally coordinated actions (RCI USA, 2024). The same year, Bucharest also hosted *the EUNIC General Assembly*, which saw Romania take the lead in leading the charge on negotiations for supporting the creative industries of Ukraine and Moldova - both geopolitically and culturally relevant to Romania's Eastern Partnership policy (EUNIC, 2024).

Romania's EUNIC outreach has also found itself in cutting-edge programming addressing national agendas and larger European cultural trends. Flowing *Streams residency project* (2024), funded by Adelina Luft and supported by *EUNIC Romania*, collaborated European artists and Romanian local partners to discuss environmental sustainability and rural water ecologies. This cross-sectorial effort resulted in public exhibitions and a joint book launch, evidencing Romania's emphasis on co-creation and cultural ecology (EUNIC Global, 2024). In the same way, *the European Film Festival*, organized by *EUNIC Romania* in 2024, promoted European film diversity in several Romanian cities, reasserting the cluster's value proposition for intercultural dialogue and creative circulation (EUNIC Romania, 2024). Institutionally, *EUNIC Romania's 2020–2024 strategy* has aimed to enhance cooperation between member organizations, increase partnerships with local civil society, and integrate cultural projects into wider EU values such as social inclusion, resilience, and sustainability. Recurrent actions - such as *the European Day of Languages, Night of Literature*, and co-organized workshops - also prove the growing capability of the Romanian cluster as a cultural brokerage in national and transnational contexts (EUNIC Romania, 2024). The continuous activity of Romania in *EUNIC* therefore also demonstrates a general strategic transition towards proactive to reactive cultural diplomacy model, based on transnational cooperation, regional solidarity, and thematic innovation.

Challenges and Critiques

Scholars point out a number of challenges in Romania's CD. There is an ongoing tension, *first,* between instrumental and intrinsic cultural policy orientations. For Stanciu (2021), post-1989 policy has favored political aims over genuine cultural engagement and thus promoted a thin conception of culture that is at odds with contemporary, plural definitions. *Second,* Romania's CD tends to not have long term objectives. Bulumac and Sapunaru (2018) observe that frequent government shifts of priorities have dispersed extended cultural programs into neglected fragments, rendering them ineffective.

Third, the digitization is both challenging and challenging. While digital platforms enjoy unparalleled reach, Romanian cultural institutions are typically resource-constrained or lacking in the skills to best utilize them (Stanciu, 2021). To boot, an "*ethos of suspicion*" regarding digitization, based on anxieties around national identity and data protection, has hindered the application of digital humanities within Romanian cultural studies (Stanciu, 2021). *Lastly*, Romania's CD is also criticized for not doing enough to connect with marginalized or indigenous groups. Although domestic efforts such as those in Budzhak are positive, more ambitious efforts at bringing Romania's Roma and other minority cultures into CD are still in their infancy stages, which tend to hinder its cultural narrative from being very inclusive (Ang, Raj Isar, & Mar, 2015).

Gaps and Future Directions

The research identifies a number of shortcomings of Romanian CD studies. *Firstly*, more empirical testing is needed of the effect of CD initiatives as existing evaluations rely on anecdotal evidence (Carta & Higgott, 2018). *Secondly*, non-state actors like diaspora communities and NGOs have not been studied in depth enough despite contributing more to constructing Romania's worldwide cultural image (Kichuk & Shevchuk, 2020). *Thirdly*, CD and digital technology integration should be researched further, especially concerning how Romania will utilize AI, virtual reality, and social media to enhance its cultural projection (Stanciu, 2021).

RO-SCUD Programme Science, Culture and Diplomacy / *Știința, Cultura și Diplomația, 2025*

RO-SCUD Programme entitled *Science, Culture and Diplomacy in Romania* / Știința, Cultura și Diplomatia) had been launched on 5th of March 2025. It had been initiated by *the Romanian Academy of Scientists* having two important institutional partners representing two remarkable Romanian universities namely: *Academia de Studii Economice* and *Universitatea Națională de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică „I.L. Caragiale"* (https://www.dcnews.ro/s-a-lansat-programul-ro-scud-stiinta-cultura-diplomatie-pentru-romania_987878.html).

RO-SCUD continues the programmes promoted by *the Academy of Romanian Scientists*, namely: *Transformarea digitală în științe* and *România Cunoașterii*.

RO-SCUD is a transdisciplinary programme that supports cooperation between different fields of sciences (https://www.ambasadoriistiintei.ro/evenimente/ro-scud-programul-aosr-stiinta-cultura-diplomatie-pentru-romania-id58.html).

In order to implement *the RO-SCUD Programme, a " think tank " group should be created, gathering high-skilled* experts, by inviting other competent people from other research institutions, higher education and culture, and a vision developed (Bratianu, 2002, 2022). There would also be actively involved young researchers, mostly those who had benefited from special funding from the Academy of Romanian Scientists in recent years. We consider that future studies also have to explore the efficiency of Romania's CD. This would include perceptions of Romanian culture abroad, especially in the countries or cities where the RCI has a local presence.

Conclusions

This article has provided a critical examination of Romania's cultural diplomacy between 2021-2025, specifically on the evolving role of *the Romanian Cultural Institute* in post-COVID renewal and evolving geopolitical imperatives. Significant progress has undoubtedly been achieved - witnessed, for instance, through upgrading programme activity, *EUNIC* initiative, and increasing outreach expanding to new presence in Tokyo - but the structural issues continue to cap the effectiveness of Romania's soft power initiative. The research uncovers a persistent imbalance in the RCI budget makeup, with an excessive share of resources allocated to administrative and operational expenses, and a relatively modest share invested in cultural programming and digital innovation. Comparative European evidence sees Romania underperforming in both absolute spending and budget-to-GDP comparisons, despite the country's own rich cultural heritage and growing institutional presence.

In order for Romanian cultural diplomacy to be sustainable and strategically effective, we consider that there is a need for an important realignment with more focus on content production, inter-disciplinary endeavours, and quantifiable public engagement. As a central part of this transformation, we strongly believe that a diversification of resources has to manifest. In addition to depending on public money, the RCI and other related cultural actors have to actively seek out private sponsorships, competitive awards, philanthropic collaborations, and revenue-generation endeavours. foreign cultural institutions' alliances, corporate sponsors, and co-branding efforts can provide economic viability in addition to increased international visibility for Romanian culture.

Additionally, we consider that intensive investment in digital capacity, diaspora outreach, and inclusive programming - especially with historically excluded groups – might have the potential to enable Romania to broaden its cultural story and synchronize its diplomacy with larger democratic principles. We appreciate that with more policy focus, institutional accountability, and intentional diversification of support, Romania might benefit on more opportunities to be able and better prepared for a transition from symbolic cultural diplomacy to a model of sustained, influential international cultural diplomacy

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